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ABSTRACT

There are at least five models for the way that learning environments are structured: (1) autocratic, (2) traditional liberal, (3) open classroom, (4) unified education, and (5) free school. The Unified Studies Program tries to blend the models in the middle. At the same time, unified education has some unique qualities that the program also tries to use: (1) a holistic perspective, (2) a unidisciplinary methodology, and (3) a quest for rigorous generalizations. Instead of learning fragmented bits of information, they begin to put things together. The aim is to produce breadth without superficiality, and to integrate life experiences with academic problem solving. (Author/KE)

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UNIFIED STUDIES -- I:8

PHILOSOPHY OF UNIFIED EDUCATION (1975)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

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AE 007176

PHILOSOPHY OF UNIFIED EDUCATION

There are at least five models for the way that learning environments are structured:

AUTOCRATIC	TRADITIONAL LIBERAL	OPEN CLASSROOM	UNIFIED EDUCATION	FREE SCHOOL

These models overlap, and should not be used as labels or pigeon-holes. A model is simply a cluster of ideas. Few schools use only one model exclusively.

The Unified Studies Program tries to blend the three models in the middle.

At the same time, unified education has some unique qualities that the program also tries to use:

-- A holistic perspective -- Basically this means being able to see a large problem from a variety of different points of view. It means "getting above" the problem and seeing the "whole" situation.

-- A uni-disciplinary methodology -- Sometimes this is called transdisciplinary. It is different from interdisciplinary in that it tries to create a new "super-discipline" out of the approaches used by scientists, economists, historians, etc.

-- A quest for rigorous generalizations -- The world is full of specialists. But specialists cannot solve the problems of the world. Only generalists can do this. The aim of unified education is to train people to deal with problems like energy, population, transportation, communications, etc. in a way that recognizes how things are linked together (e.g. a new highway can create a housing shortage; but stopping construction creates unemployment; which in turn creates ..... etc.)

These qualities of unified education are not just educational jargon. If people really learn this way, they find that they are learning and saying different things. Instead of learning fragmented bits of information, they begin to put things together. The aim is not to indulge in eighteenth century salon-style chit chat. The aim is to produce breadth without superficiality. It is to integrate life experiences with academic problem solving. It is to do whole learning.

ALTERNATIVE EDUCATIONAL MODELS

(Caution: these are generalizations and are therefore distortions)

"AUTOCRATIC MODEL"

teacher rules the classroom
power is centralized
rigid rules must be obeyed (frequently equally enforced)
rigid teaching methods
relatively strict curriculum favoring the classics
rigid examinations
discipline by the rod
education largely for the elite
stress upon "proper manners"
frequent use of coercion
frequent use of militaristic models

"LIBERAL MODEL"

efficient, timed (bells and buzzers start and end timed learning periods -- usually 50 minutes).
curriculum rationalized and fragmented into "courses" and "disciplines"
stress upon uniformity of "standards" (e.g. standardized tests)
compulsory, "popular" (public) school systems
frequent use of manipulation rather than coertion
rigid "core" requirements stressing "basic" knowledge and skills needed by society
emphasis upon the Liberal Arts
use of projects
emphasis upon individualism (everyone does his own work -- and is solely responsible for his own success or failure helping others is cheating -- or ruine the curve)
heavy emphasis upon "grades", "ranks", and "tracks" (classification of individuals upon the basis of ability)
use of "degrees" (e.g. B.A. and Ph.D. as rewards and proof of achievement)
stress upon learning from ones mistakes rather than from ones successes
teachers job is largely to correct errors
teachers must be "certified" (i.e. a bricklayer cannot be a teacher)
educational institutions run by a hierarchy of power (from the top "down" -- students at the bottom)
heavy emphasis upon the use of committees in the decision making process
reliance upon "rules of order", constitutions and by-laws
teacher-centered classroom (e.g. teacher's desk is bigger and in commanding position)
students look at the teacher -- not each other
use of lectures and teacher-led discussions in which the teacher talks to one student at a time for the most part
stress upon orderliness, proper procedures, being on time (attendance) etc.

learning is largely conceived of as being a "product' rather than a 'process" (What do you know?" rather "How do you think?)
emphasis upon data retention (e.g. students who appear on the college -- Bowl T.V. show)
quick recall knowledge is a vertue
when writing papers, students are often graded more on their grammar and presentation than on their ideas
emphasis upon self-discipline in following orders (heavy use of guilt as a motivation for learning)
occasional use of "teacher's pets" as models of achievement ("Uncle Dicks" and "Aunt Janes")

"OPEN EDUCATIONAL MODEL"

learning environment is structured by the teacher so as to provide a variety of choices for the students (rather than having twenty-five students doing the same thing at the same time)
use of "learning groups" (of from eight to twelve students each)
rotating leardership within the learning groups (no "president, V.P.'s and Secretaries")
few put-downs
no grading or ranking of individuals
little competition
students take responsibility for their own learning
frequent use of student-centered (student-led) discussions
students participate in the planning of their work
multi-media imputs
"listening"
"doing" (much emphasis upon "stuff" in the classroom
minimum use of time schedule
learning is "play/work"
emphasis upon trust rather than either manipulation or coercion
students learn from each other
teachers learn from students
teachers learn from each other (team teaching by discipline)
much emphasis upon cooperation
use of consensus in the decision making process (few notes are taken -- the majority does not rule -- minority feelings are taken into consideration)
seldom use committees
stress upon the unpredictable (curiosity/creativity)
quiet, disciplined self motivation (people learn because they want to learn)
learning tends to be a "process" rather than a "product" (problem solving)
there is a great deal of mobility for people's bodies (no need to ask permission to leave the room)
classes tend to have more "noise"
students have the freedom to choose -- but often have no freedom NOT to choose (this is in part what makes the open classroom differ from a free school environment)

"UNIFIED EDUCATIONAL MODEL"

no separate "classes"
mixed age groups
learning takes place outside the classroom
use of metaphor and generalization
learning how to use tools
no "departments" or "fragmented" disciplines
learning is "whole learning"
no compartmentalization of studies
seldom uses textbooks
use of "real life" learning (e.g. apprentice type learning)
deal with multi-faceted problem from a variety of perpectives at the same time (e.g. "How can this planet survive?)
use of the broadest possible learning environment with which a person can cope
emphasis upon the senses (including common sense)
learning experiences are not broken up
learning is living
learning is building and making
use of action teams with limited goals
emphasis upon setting limits and goals
"community" learning
teacher means facilitator -- anyone can be teacher
learning has no time limits
has no concept of wasting time (all living is learning)
emphasis upon the present (learning is not done consecutively -- what you know is what you know now) -- "remembering" and "fantasy" are the past and the future -- they are part of the present.
learning is unpredictable and unmeasureable
stress upon utility of learning
reliance upon insights and inspiration
recognizes little difference between scientific and un-scientific thought
more emphasis upon the importance of people and problems than upon "things"
learning is sometimes "messy"
authority is when people recognize wisdom
people are known by what they are more often than by what their "image" is
learning tends to be practical poetics
education is populist rather than public
all learning are equal?
learning is frequently "feeling"
strong sense of wanting to do good things for other people
knowing that what you are and what you do is in large part the result of your own choices
tendency to avoid "reform" movements in education (with their implied put downs)
taking chances -- making mistakes
learning what ones own needs are and not being overly critical of others needs
learning to deal with pervasive change
unidisciplinary

"FREE SCHOOL MODEL"

little or no structure in the learning environment
"do your own thing"
sense of the communal
self discipline alone
emphasis upon creative chaos
seldom uses the concept of time
good for people who can handle extreme freedom and lack of structure
a great deal of energy is needed to function in a free environment
tends to view school as a free place in a hostile world
tends to define itself by saying what it is not (i.e. anti-liberal, etc. -- a "coming out from" movement)
tendency towards in group-exclusivement
use of T-groups
heavy emphasis upon community responsibility and dealing with people's feeling after someone has done something